

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-06

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 CA-01 HA-05 L-03 H-01 PA-01
ICA-11 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 /049 W
-----075623 230429Z /11

R 221550Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7530
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CARR, SHUM, NU (DILLON, MARGARET MARY AND WARNSHUIS,
JULIANNE)
SUBJECT: TEMPORARY DETENTION OF TWO MARYKNOLL NUNS

1. ON 16 AUGUST TWO AMCIT NUNS, MEMBERS OF THE MARYKNOLL ORDER, SISTER MARGARET DILLON A/K/A SISTER PEGGY AND SISTER JULIANNE WARNSHUIS, WERE ARRESTED BY POLICE IN OPEN 3 (A LOW-COST HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN MANAGUA) AND TAKEN TO THE CENTRAL POLICE STATION IN MANAGUA FOR QUESTIONING. ONE OF THE NUNS, SISTER PEGGY, ADMITTED TO HAVING BEEN A PARTICIPANT IN A "PEACE RALLY" SPONSORED BY AMPRONAC (AN ANTI-GOVERNMENT WOMEN'S ACTIVIST ORGANIZATION) IN OPEN 3. SISTER JULIANNE WAS NOT A PARTICIPANT IN THE MARCH BUT INSISTED ON ACCOMPANYING HER COLLEAGUE TO THE POLICE STATION UPON HER ARREST. BOTH CONSUL AND AMBASSADOR WERE INDEPENDENTLY INFORMED OF ARREST, AND CONSUL'S IMMEDIATE ENQUIRY DETERMINED THAT NUNS ALREADY HAD BEEN RELEASED.

2. THE NUNS REPORTED TO EMB THE FOLLOWING DAY THAT AFTER APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR AND A HALF OF QUESTIONING AT THE
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POLICE STATION, THEY WERE RELEASED WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT NO CHARGES HAD BEEN FILED AGAINST THEM. THE NUNS CLAIMED, HOWEVER, THAT THE POLICE HAD STERNLY REPRIMANDED THEM FOR WHAT THE POLICE DETERMINED AN ACTIVIST ROLE IN NICARAGUAN POLITICS AND PARTICULARLY IN AGITATING THE RESIDENTS OF OPEN 3 AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THE NUNS DEFENDED THEIR POSITION BY STATING

THAT THEY WERE SIMPLY SYMPATHIZING WITH THE CONCERNS OF OPEN 3 RESIDENTS FOR BETTER LIVING CONDITIONS AND SERVICES.

3. BOTH NUNS STATED TO EMBOFFS THAT THEY WERE NOT MISTREATED BY POLICE BUT WERE HIGHLY CONCERNED OVER THE MANNER IN WHICH THE MARCH HAD BEEN BROKEN UP BY POLICE. ALTHOUGH NIETHER TEAR GAS NOR GUNFIRE WAS EMPLOYED, THE NUNS COMPLAINED THAT THE POLICE HAD USED FORCE AGAINST THE WOMEN AND HAD ATTEMPTED TO TAKE SEVERAL OF THEM INTO CUSTODY. SINCE THE WOMEN DID NOT HAVE THE REQUIRED PERMIT TO CONDUCT THE MARCH, THE POLICE INSISTED ON ARRESTING THEM AND BREAKING UP THE MARCH. SISTER PEGGY DILLON INTERFERED WITH ATTEMPTS BY THE POLICE TO ARREST THE OTHER WOMEN AND INSISTED THAT ONLY SHE BE TAKEN TO THE POLICE STATION IN REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN--A REQUEST WITH WHICH THE POLICE COMPLIED.

4. COMMENT: EMB HAS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT SINCE BOTH NUNS WERE RELEASED QUICKLY, THE GON WILL NOT PURSUE FURTHER ACTIONS AGAINST THEM UNLESS THEY ARE AGAIN INVOLVED IN ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS. THEY WERE ADVISED BY EMBOFFS THAT THE GON MIGHT CHOOSE TO DEPORT THEM IF THEY CONTINUE TO PARTICIPATE IN DOMONSTRATIONS THAT ARE ILLEGAL. EMB CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF THESE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AMCIT NUNS AND THE EVENTS WHICH TRANSPIRED ON 16 AUGUST WILL BE PRESENTED ORALLY TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER BY THE AMB.

5. POL COMMENT: INCIDENTS OF THIS TYPE INVOLVING AMCIT PRIESTS AND NUNS MAY BE THE RESULT OF SEVERAL INTERWOVEN FACTORS. ONE, THE AMCIT MISSIONARIES, IN THE QUEST TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF NICARAGUANS, OFTEN ENGAGE IN EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER ACTIVITIES WHICH SOME PARTS OF THE GON SEE AS THREATENING AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT. ADDITIONALLY, PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, RALLIES, ETC., HELD OUT OF DOORS REQUIRE PERMITS WHICH, AS THEY ARE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN, ARE OFTEN NOT SECURED PRIOR TO THE EVENT. WITH THE INCREASED SCHISM BETWEEN GON AND CHURCH WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE RESULTED FROM THE TWO CHURCH STATEMENTS ISSUED RECENTLY, IT IS LIKELY THAT PRIESTS AND NUNS WILL INCREASINGLY FALL UNDER GN SCRUTINY AND FURTHER INCIDENS MAY RESULT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DETENTION, WOMEN, CLERGYMEN, PRISONERS RELEASE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MANAGU03899
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780344-0273
Format: TEL
From: MANAGUA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780838/aaaabfkd.tel
Line Count: 113
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 847a635f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SCS
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1662744
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TEMPORARY DETENTION OF TWO MARYKNOLL NUNS
TAGS: CARR, SHUM, NU, (DILLON, MARGARET MARY), (WARNSHUIS, JULIANNE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/847a635f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014